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ABSTRACT

Emergency certification involves the issuance of teaching licenses to individuals who have not completed a traditional college or university teacher education program. This two-page information review examines the problems arising from emergency certification and its relationship to student achievement. Some alternatives to emergency certification are suggested. Eleven references on this topic are listed. (JD)

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EMERGENCY TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Current efforts to strengthen American public education have, in some states, actually produced a potent threat to educational quality. That threat, known variously as "alternative" or "emergency" certification, involves the issuance of teaching licenses to individuals who have not completed a traditional college or university teacher education program. New Jersey and California are two states that have enacted or are considering enacting emergency-certification policies, an apparent response to teacher shortages (Shymansky and Aldridge 1982; Daly et al. 1983) and widespread criticism of public education (Williamson et al. 1984).

The Definition of Teacher Certification

Teacher certification is a process designed to ensure that individuals seeking to enter teaching meet minimum standards for competence (Koff, Florio, and Cronin 1976). Schools, colleges, and departments of education "certify" that their graduates have met such minimum standards, thus recommending them for licensure by the state.

Certification generally applies to new teachers only; a few states require teachers to take additional course work in order to remain in the profession (Cronin 1983). Full certification implies that a teacher candidate has successfully completed a program that meets the standards set by states for licensure (Williamson et al. 1984).

By contrast, emergency certification usually means issuance of certificates to people who have not fulfilled the requirements for regular certification. Typically granted on a temporary basis, many emergency certificates carry an expectation that the teacher will obtain the necessary credentials or be replaced eventually by a regularly certified person (Williamson et al. 1984).

In addition to issuing emergency certificates to both degreed and nondegreed persons, many states allow personnel to teach "out of field" (Williamson et al. 1984). For example, Shymansky and Aldridge (1982) reported that half of all newly employed science and mathematics teachers in 1981 were unqualified to teach those subjects. In 1980, 3.5 percent of elementary and 6.1 percent of secondary school teachers were teaching full time outside their major field of preparation (National Education Association 1983).

Some states are considering changing the definition of certification. The Southern Regional Education Board (1981) suggested that states adjust certification requirements to allow those with degrees in math and science but no professional training to teach at the secondary level. Boyer (1983) suggested granting part-time teaching credentials to retired professors and to those in business and industry. The New Jersey "Blueprint for Reform" proposes that initial licensure not require completion of a professional program in a college or university, and that formal professional training consist of a one-week orientation.

Problems Related to Emergency Certification

Williamson et al. (1984) listed several problems associated with emergency certification, including:

- Reduction of the profession's capacity to maintain standards for teachers and improve standards for professional training. The certification requirement assumes that individuals who are qualified to teach may be distinguished from those who are not. Alternative measures imply that the process of professional training and certification is irrelevant to ensuring effective teaching. According to Williamson et al., teaching is the only state-licensed occupation for which the response to personnel shortage is certification of untrained individuals.
- Decrease in the number of qualified teachers. Qualified candidates may be discouraged from seeking employment because positions are filled by unqualified candidates. Also, prospective teachers may not seek professional training because it is seen as unnecessary.
- Discouragement of research into effective educational practice. Use of emergency measures denies the importance of what is known and what remains to be known about sound instructional practice.

Emergency Certification and Student Achievement

According to Greenberg (1983), the profession of teaching requires knowledge about the nature of the

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learner and the role of the teacher in the learning process, the ability to analyze the context of teaching and learning, and the demonstration of refined skills in an applied setting. The need for certification stems from recognition of these ideas and the belief that teacher candidates must exhibit these competencies before entering the profession. Greenberg pointed out that even though criteria for certification may be imperfect, to eliminate certification would be to abdicate responsibility for improving education.

Williamson et al. (1984) reviewed evidence that fully certified teachers are more effective than are those who lack qualifications for full certification. Bledsoe, Cox, and Burnham (1967) conducted an indepth, longitudinal study comparing teachers who had completed a professional sequence in education with those who had not. The study reported significant differences between the two groups, supporting the hypothesis that the professional teachers in the sample were superior to the nonprofessional teachers.

Similarly, Koehler (1984) cited studies of classroom-management skills conducted in the 1970s. In those studies, students of trained teachers increased achievement scores more than did those whose teachers were untrained in classroom management.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Full certification of teachers and the professional training it implies have a logical and empirical foundation. Yet teacher shortages in some areas and subjects will probably persist and even worsen, heightening the need for ways of ensuring adequate teacher supply without resorting to emergency certification.

Williamson et al. (1984) presented several alternatives to emergency certification:

- Developing incentive programs to improve teacher supply in areas and subjects where shortages exist;
- Revamping funding for teacher education programs to encourage preparation of teachers for immediate and predicted shortage areas;
- Implementing immediately programs such as job banks and referral systems in states with shortages of qualified teachers;
- Installing stronger checks on schools' hiring processes to ensure that only qualified personnel are hired;
- Establishing differentiated staffing in schools to allow entry into the profession at several levels;
- Suspending classes for which qualified teachers cannot be found;
- Increasing the student-teacher ratio and adding teaching assistants;
- Borrowing college faculty members who are certified to teach in the schools.

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